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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 002594

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

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SUBJECT: ZUMA SEEKS UNITY AS HIS COALITION COMES UNDER THREAT

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Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) President Julius Malema, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), and the South African Communist Party (SACP) have been trading public barbs during the past week, a clear sign that the loose coalition of forces which brought President Jacob Zuma to power is tottering. In an attempt to tamp down these growing tensions, Zuma addressed the SACP congress December 12, and called public disputes alien to the culture of South African politics; he also reportedly addressed the infighting at a special session of the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) on December 14. Zuma was propelled to power at the 2007 ANC party congress by support from the SACP, unions, and ANC members from the Youth League and Women's League, all of whom were disgruntled with the autocratic rule of then-President Thabo Mbeki. Backing from these elements sustained Zuma as he ran for President of South Africa earlier this year and helped him win the public relations battle he faced over the state's corruption case against him, which was ultimately dropped. However, it seems that individual agendas among some of the leaders of its constituent parts are beginning to undermine the strength of this alliance, forcing Zuma to intervene and try to find ways of maintaining unity while also asserting ANC leadership. (Note: Although Zuma's loose coalition of forces is under threat, we do not see the ruling tripartite alliance as being under threat of falling apart. End Note.) Whether or not he succeeds in this balancing act may determine the success or failure of his Presidency. End Summary.

Political Infighting on the Rise . . .

¶2. (C) SACP delegates booed ANCYL President Julius Malema on December 10 when he was introduced by SACP National Chairperson Gwede Mantashe. The negative reaction most likely stems from the public argument between Malema and SACP Deputy Secretary General Jeremy Cronin. Cronin wrote an article disagreeing with Malema's call for the nationalization of South Africa's mines. In response, Malema called Cronin a "white messiah." Following the booing by

SACP delegates, Malema reportedly asked Mantashe if he could address the crowd and the SACP chair refused the request. The ANCYL President then walked out of the SACP's congress and denounced the delegates' treatment of him in an interview with e-TV. The SACP responded by calling Malema a "drama queen" and Malema is reported to have sent Cronin an angry text message warning "wait until you see what is coming in your direction." Zuma addressed the SACP in a closed session on December 12 and told delegates that infighting and name-calling would not be tolerated by the party's leadership. He also called a special meeting of the ANC's NEC for December 14 where the infighting would be discussed. (Note: As of December 15, there was no information publicly on what was discussed at the NEC meeting. End Note.)

¶3. (C) The dispute does not appear to be quieting down. In the days following Zuma's address, the battle lines have been drawn between the trade unionists and communists on one side and the ANCYL leader on the other. Young Communist League (YCL) President Buti Manamela said publicly, "Those who continue to call our leaders racist should never have illusions of receiving red-carpet treatment in this congress." He added that "those who make the threats (of using the youth to mobilize against organizations such as the SACP) should know that the YCL is also there in every campus. We are prepared to meet fire with fire." Manamela also told reporters that Malema's exit from the congress was driven by the fact that he was "running away from engaging in a constructive debate with communists. Any attempt to play drama queen and disrupt this congress will not be appreciated." NUMSA, one of the biggest affiliates of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), released a statement saying that the structures of the ANCYL have been "unleashing missives to the SACP as part of reinforcing the

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resurgence of anti-SACP posturing within our revolutionary alliance as led by the ANC." NUMSA, which is largely less pragmatic than COSATU senior leadership, fully supported the SACP's stance on nationalization and place within the alliance. NUMSA spokesperson Castro Ngobese, who attended the SACP congress, said attacks between the SACP and ANCYL should be "located and understood within the context of the realignment of different class forces and fractions (sic) within the ANC who see the SACP as a threat to their narrow and self-centered accumulation interests."

¶4. (C) The ANCYL blamed the SACP's desire for greater power in the ANC for the latest public dispute. The league accused SACP Secretary General Blade Nzimande of wanting to oust ANC Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe. Malema said that the league would oppose an attempt by the communists to take over senior positions in the ANC. ANCYL spokesperson Floyd Shivambu, who attended the SACP congress as a member of the YCL, said, "We will not agree to the dumping of undemocratic leaders into the ANC, and we will decide on the leadership of the ANC when the time is right." The league's national working committee resolved on December 14 to oppose the election of communists to top positions in the ANC. The ANCYL also wants to oust Mantashe at the ruling party's congress in 2012 because he serves as a senior leader of the SACP. Malema on December 15 told reporters at the National Press Club that the treatment he received at the SACP's conference was a planned tactic to throw down the "gauntlet to the youth league." He said, "It (the treatment he received) was an invitation to war and I knew this. We have to leave it to the youth league to decide whether they are accepting this invite to war. The youth league accepted the invite and we are not going to retreat." The ANCYL also said that Mantashe's silence on the booing incident is because the ANC Secretary General has a position in the SACP and does not want to speak out on the issue.

. . . Putting Zuma in a Tough Spot

15. (C) Zuma, a known consensus builder, has sought the middle ground in the dispute. Zuma told the SACP on December 12 that the alliance is home to different people, with different characters, who raise issues differently. He said, "At times (people) irritate in meetings. They just have a culture of irritating. The critical thing is how do we handle such comrades? Do you also become an irritant? You can't." Zuma added, "The public outbursts and acrimonious exchanges are not in the tradition of the alliance, irrespective of where they come from ... If we believe that somebody among ourselves is ill-disciplined, let us deal with the matter. If we don't deal with it, we allow this sickness to eat the alliance up like a cancer."

16. (C) In a press interview on December 14, Zuma told reporters that the objective of the alliance was to stir debate and that he was unfazed by the infighting. He noted, "We've got a country that must accommodate everybody ... what has been critical in the alliance is that those debates help us to move forward." The ANC leader also put the public infighting in perspective, saying that "this is not a new issue. During the days of Peter Mokaba, we had a lot of Qissue. During the days of Peter Mokaba, we had a lot of this, so there is nothing new with Malema." Zuma admitted that the SACP was out of line in its treatment of Malema. He stated, "We must say things that provoke people. You can't also say we should be booing one another. Everybody did not behave well." In general, Zuma said he welcomed the debate.

Zuma's Base Cracking, But Not Because of Him

17. (C) Fractures in Zuma's support base have grown in recent months, with the outburst between Malema and the SACP and COSATU only the most recent display of infighting. The cracks are largely because of problems in the base itself, not because of Zuma's leadership. The ANC's decision on November 8 to reaffirm the party's support for Minister in the Presidency for National Planning Trevor Manuel's controversial plan for a National Planning Commission, made it clear to the ANC's allies in the tripartite alliance, the trade unions and communist party, that Zuma has final say on policy decisions, and was not about to embark on the total

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rethink of economic policy some of them wanted. SACP and COSATU were said to be severely disappointed about the adoption of the commission. Journalist Mandy Rossouw told Poloff last month that the traditional paradigm of "left" and "right" is shifting in the ruling alliance as senior communists and leaders with a trade union background move towards an increasingly pragmatic stance. She contends that an alignment between pragmatic "leftists" and ministers who served in the last Cabinet has taken place, crowding out many of the more radical elements.

18. (C) She also noted, "Those supporting Zuma (at the ANC's 2007 congress in Polokwane) are divided into the principled left, those who were in trouble with the Scorpions (FYI: the now-abolished anti-corruption police unit), and those who didn't get tenders. And the cracks are starting to show." She added that the emerging tensions in the alliance are making it increasingly clear that these factions have different agendas. In an article in the "Mail and Guardian" published on November 27, Rossouw wrote that an ANC NEC member told her that "there is a populist, right-wing element in the ANC that includes people such as Tony Yengeni and Malema. This grouping is Africanist in nature and believes in militant populism -- and they are loud and crude."

19. (C) Anthony Butler on December 14 argued in a column for "Business Day" that the recent SACP congress was a "watershed moment" for the disparate coalition of forces that propelled

Zuma into the ANC's top position. In his view, the coalition of forces is no more. Butler stated that Zuma has ignored policy proposals from the communists and the trade unionists and is sanctioning the anti-communist crusade that Malema seems to be instigating. Butler also wrote that Zuma's speech to the SACP delegates strongly resembled remarks that Mbeki would have made to the communists. Butler said, "Zuma reduced the function of the SACP to that of a talking shop." Words such as, "The SACP should play its historical role and provide robust and profound intellectual an ideological debate to the alliance" or "The party ought to play a role in making suggestions in what we can do better" in Butler's view show that Zuma is secure enough to ignore those elements that brought him into power.

Comment

¶10. (C) The break-up of the coalition of forces that brought Zuma to power probably will hurt the forces themselves more than the South African President. The SACP, COSATU, and ANCYL currently have greater access to the machinery of state power than ever before, but so far have been unable to steer Zuma or the party away from many of the same policies on the economic front Mbeki had been following. Their access to state power means that the tripartite alliance will remain intact for the foreseeable future, but we think their rivalry will, if anything, reduce their collective influence on Zuma and his government. While Zuma's call for unity may be ineffective in bridging the gap between the ANC, unions, and communists, it does demonstrate that those groups got exactly the kind of consensus-building leader everyone understood Zuma to be. Over the longer term, Mantashe and others with positions both in the ANC and in the alliance may be the real losers of all this acrimony as they could be voted from posts in the ruling party at the congress in 2012. The groups that brought Zuma into power were always strange strategic partners. Now the partnership appears to be coming apart.

End comment.

GIPS